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AUTHOR Foster, Susan E.
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ABSTRACT

As the literacy requirements for functioning in today's society continue to increase, so do the qualifications and level of professional development that is expected of those who provide literacy education to adults. Historically, it has been assumed that, with a modest amount of preparation, anyone can teach any other adult to read. Recently, however, there has been increasing recognition of the fact that this is not the case. In the array of currently existing professional development opportunities available to literacy staff, there is no agreement on what constitutes adequate training. Despite agreement among the leaders in adult literacy throughout the nation that preservice and inservice training are needed, there is no support system for professional development in the field of adult literacy. Advancing the state of the art of literacy education requires building a profession. Standards related to what should be taught, who will be taught, what methods and techniques will be used, and how programs and staff will be assessed and evaluated must be developed. Adopting a set of standards is not sufficient by itself. It will also be necessary to create an institutional infrastructure to support professional development, change the culture of literacy providers, and provide the resources that teachers and administrators need to take advantage of training and professional development opportunities. (MN)

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PROFESSIONALIZATION OF THE ADULT LITERACY WORKFORCE

by

Susan E. Foster
Brizius & Foster

Background Paper Prepared for

Project on Adult Literacy

of the

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FOREWORD

This paper is one of several prepared by consultants to The Project on Adult Literacy sponsored by the Southport Institute for Policy Analysis. The papers were commissioned to help the Project's staff develop an in-depth understanding of various issues and perspectives bearing on the federal role in promoting adult literacy.

In total, seven papers were commissioned. They were prepared during the fall of 1988. The consultants who prepared them met as a group five times during that period and vigorously debated each other's work as well as other issues concerning adult literacy. At no time during this process did the Project's staff require that the consultants agree with each other or with the conclusions being formulated by the staff. The consultants were given complete freedom to state their own ideas.

As a result, the views expressed in this paper are those of the author alone. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the Southport Institute, the Project on Adult Literacy or any of the other consultants involved with the Project's work.

The Southport Institute is making these working papers available to help increase understanding and stimulate discussion about the problems of adult literacy and as an expression of gratitude for the contribution of the authors to the Project on Adult Literacy.

The working papers prepared for the Project are:

Judith A. Alamprese:	Adult Research and Development: An Agenda for Action
William B. Bliss:	Providing Adult Basic Education Services to Adults with Limited English Proficiency
Jack A. Brizius:	The State Role in Adult Literacy Policy
Paul V. Delker and William J. Yakowicz:	Toward the Vision of a Literate Society
Susan E. Foster:	Professionalization of the Adult Literacy Workforce
Arnold Packer:	Retooling the American Workforce: The Role of Technology in Improving Adult Literacy During the 1990s
William F. Pierce:	A Redefined Federal Role in Adult Literacy: Integrated Policies, Programs, and Procedures

These papers are available from: The Project on Adult Literacy, Suite 415, 440 First Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20001, (202) 783-7058.

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PROFESSIONALIZATION OF THE ADULT LITERACY WORKFORCE

by
Susan E. Foster

INTRODUCTION

The literacy requirements for functioning in today's society are more complex than those of a generation ago and they are increasing. National estimates point to the need for increased literacy skills for fifteen to twenty percent of our population. Literacy and basic skills programs are reaching only a very small percentage of adults in need. Even more troubling is that most existing literacy programs are not yielding significant skill gains for those who enroll in them. While many factors undoubtedly contribute to this problem, major issues that must be examined include the preparation and skills of the teachers, aides, facilitators, volunteers and administrators.

Literacy providers are often highly dedicated individuals working under adverse circumstances. Most of the people who manage programs or teach adults basic skills are drawn from other professions or segments of the teaching profession and receive little or no training or training that is inappropriate to the task at hand. They need support and encouragement to upgrade their own skills and to apply the latest techniques to the unique task of teaching adults. As the system devoted to improving the basic skills of adults grows, new teachers, facilitators, volunteers and administrators will have to be more qualified if the quality of outcomes is to be improved.

The purpose of this paper is to examine how literacy staffs are prepared for their tasks and to define what actions should be taken to upgrade their skills. In addition, this paper explores the investments that would be needed to create a new profession — a field of endeavor devoted primarily to improving the basic skills of adults.

THE CHALLENGE OF LITERACY INSTRUCTION

Literacy is best represented as a continuum of various types of skills. At one end of the continuum are individuals with no or limited ability to read, write or compute at the most basic

level. Lower levels of literacy also may be correlated with limited ability to solve problems and effectively communicate. At the other end of the continuum are individuals whose mastery of the basic skills often is accompanied by a more highly developed ability to utilize information, solve problems and communicate.

Major attention is being focused today on the mismatch between the skills needed for the workforce and the skills possessed by the workforce. Recent studies, most notably the National Assessment for Educational Progress, have pointed out that while the absolute lack of literacy skills is rare, few young adults can deal successfully with more complex tasks requiring problem-solving skills. These more complex skills are increasingly required in the workplace and to function adequately in family and community life. The task facing the nation is to help individuals move up this continuum of skills. If this goal is to be achieved, the task of the literacy instructor becomes crucial.

The job of helping individuals enhance their literacy skills is a formidable one — one that requires skill and training on the part of the instructor and takes a long time to accomplish. It is not a task that can be accomplished by a national cadre of untrained workers, no matter how well intended. It is not a task that can be accomplished by volunteers alone. It is not a task that can be accomplished by simply extending the responsibilities of our elementary and secondary education system. In particular, this task cannot be accomplished solely by infusing the existing system of literacy providers with additional funds.

Improving the skills of basic skills providers and improving the quality of literacy programs will require a thorough understanding of the motivations for and roadblocks to adult learning. Making significant gains in the literacy skills of adults will require a critical assessment of the performance of existing program[illegible]d approaches to literacy enhancement as well as a commitment to advancing the state of the art. It is a task that will require training and institutional support for the development of a literacy profession. It will also require recognition on the part of many adults that while they possess basic reading and writing skills they are not literate in light of today's economic and social requirements.

To make these changes, we first must be honest about the effectiveness of existing programs. With few exceptions, literacy programs today can demonstrate very limited gains in literacy improvement. Part of the problem is that we have not settled on a meaningful way to measure success. Most leaders in the field agree that we need a better way to evaluate literacy gains and a system of measuring improvement of literacy skills that is predicated upon the types of skills that will be required in the workforce and everyday life — not simply grade-related reading levels.

While many program evaluations have declared individual programs to be a success in improving the literacy skills of the learners, the extent of the gains suggest otherwise. Reviewing the work of many others in the field, Diekhoff states: "The majority of adult literacy participants do not accomplish meaningful, practically significant reading improvements and leave training without having achieved 'functional literacy,' however one may choose to define it." 1/ Thus, while many programs report statistically significant gains in literacy skills, such gains may still have no real practical significance. For example, how significant is it that an individual moves from a second to a third and one-half grade reading level in one year and then drops out of the program? In fact, only a very small percentage of participants in adult literacy programs ever acquire reading and math skills comparable to those taught in the 8th grade. 2/

Instructional staff working with learners who experience the most gains seem to be those who are willing to abandon traditional teaching methods and adapt methods and materials that are relevant to the learner. 3/ Yet, we persist in assuming for a major part of our adult literacy system that adequate preparation for adult literacy instructors or facilitators is traditional teacher training. Further, despite increasing availability of adult-oriented materials, some literacy programs still use methods and materials developed for use in the elementary and secondary education system. This is partially due to the lack of knowledge on the part of administrators and partially due to the fact that literacy programs rely on more traditional and structured approaches to instruction to compensate for untrained staff.

Virtually all types of adult basic skills programs experience very high drop-out rates. Reviewing the retention rates of adult education programs, Diekhoff reports that "the majority of ... students (in adult basic education programs) persist in training for less than one year, with only 20 percent maintaining enrollment for longer than that." 4/ This finding is also reinforced by Mikulecky who estimates that there is probably an 80 to 90 percent attrition rate for persons receiving less than one hundred hours of instruction in all types of programs. 5/ Program participation is also characterized by the "on-again" "off-again" nature of attendance where learners attend several classes, drop out, sign up at a later date and drop out again.

High drop out rates for many literacy programs result from a broad array of programmatic, social and economic factors. A major factor seems to be the mismatch of personal and program motives. In too many cases, programs fail to relate instruction to the goals and expectations — the motivation — of the individual participant. Motivation also is related to the amount of time required to complete a task. Improving literacy skills is an enormously time consuming proposition. Gains are slow and in many cases the slow progress is not sufficient to warrant staying with the program.

Some observers believe that high attrition rates are to be expected in adult instructional programs, simply because the economic constraints and stresses of life for people with low skills will always mean that many cannot complete long and difficult courses of instruction. Others place more blame on the quality of the programs. While there is debate about why high dropout rates are occurring, these high attrition rates do tell us something: programs and the instructional techniques used are not holding the interest of adult students and they are not helping adults to overcome the barriers to achievement of significant learning gains.

Instructors whose students experience higher learning gains seem to be those who have "holding power" — that is, they seem to be able to match personal and program goals and encourage students to stay with the program. 6/ This "holding power" is related to the instructor's ability to involve students in learning and to tie basic skills to immediate goals in the life of the adult.

Some researchers have concluded that more sophisticated training along traditional models is necessary, further suggesting that more advanced education in adult literacy be pursued as a prerequisite to practice. While evidence abounds of the need for increased levels of training, however, the lack of research clearly documenting the utility of traditional academic approaches to training is so striking and the existence of research and practical experience showing the advantages of untraditional approaches so compelling that we must conclude that it is time to reevaluate the field's approach to the entire area of staff preparation. 7/

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT LITERACY INSTRUCTION

The task of the literacy instructor is to help individuals move along on the continuum of skills to the point where they can function adequately in today's workforce as well as meet personal goals for family and community life. Many literacy programs have embraced this goal in the past. Considerable debate and honest difference of opinion exists, however, about how to reach the goal. Opinions differ about how far individuals need to move along the continuum, the content of literacy instruction, why literacy instruction should be provided, and about the nature of literacy itself.

Despite these differences, all literacy programs operate from some common ground. All programs operate on the assumption that motivation of the adult is critical to success. All providers believe that instructors should exhibit a degree of caring about the persons they teach. Most programs operate on the philosophy that instructors should be sensitive to the family and community environment of the learner. The major types of programs operating

today do have substantial differences in the emphasis they place on the importance of these elements of common ground. For example:

• Historically, the volunteer tutoring approach has been predicated on the assumption that, with a modest amount of preparation, anyone can teach any other adult to read. Recently, however, many volunteer programs have begun to work in close association with trained staff. The leadership for most tutoring programs has also recognized that training is as essential as dedication for tutors to be successful in helping adults to improve their skills.

• The assumption behind most programs operating in local education agencies and community colleges has been that an instructor should be trained in helping learners acquire academic skills, the culmination of which would be the acquisition of the general education diploma (GED). The skills needed to pass the GED are thus assumed to be the skills needed to function adequately in the workforce. While most individuals participating in these programs never attain the degree of proficiency represented by a GED and while there are federal restrictions on the percentage of funds which can be used for GED attainment, the philosophical thrust of the programs remains. Because of this emphasis, prerequisites for instructors often include credentials for elementary and secondary education. In fact, most adult education instructors in programs operated by local education agencies and community colleges are moonlighting elementary and secondary education teachers.

• Many community-based programs have been built around the belief that the lack of literacy skills is just one of many problems facing individuals as they seek to become self-sufficient. Advocates of the community-based approach insist that counseling and community advocacy skills are essential for facilitators and other staff members. Literacy staff must be sensitive to the family and community environment and personal goals of the learner and must be skilled in providing literacy services in the context of the life circumstances of the learner. Community-based programs focus on the importance of treating the adult learner with respect and dignity. They have been leaders in breaking away from child-oriented instructional practices.

• Workplace literacy programs have been developed on the assumption that the best motivation for skill enhancement is job retention or promotion and that instruction must be done in the context of the job environment of the learner by someone knowledgeable about that environment. They are further predicated on the assumption that support from the employer is a critical factor in the motivation and success of the learner.

• Military literacy programs represent a special type of workplace literacy program. Rigid job-specific curriculum requirements have been developed to enhance skills through these programs. The military approach has been to control the content of instruction to the

point that virtually anyone with a college degree could become an instructor with little or no additional training.

Recent research shows that there are elements of a productive approach in all of these efforts. New information is available today that can help us rethink and refocus these assumptions. Information also is available on the types of skills needed to function in our economy that can clarify and better target instruction. Before proceeding to a discussion of the state of the art in literacy instruction, it is important to understand the nature and extent of skill training now required for literacy staff and to understand the context within which literacy training is provided.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE TO LITERACY STAFF

In a 1985 report for the Business Council for Effective Literacy, David Harman commented on the current status of professionalism among literacy staff: "In adult literacy programs, the range of qualifications of the instructors currently is very wide. Some have received a certain amount of training and are certified. Some have been certified as school teachers and apply teaching skills that are inappropriate. Others have no training at all and are not properly equipped for the role." 8/

In the array of literacy programs operating today, there is no agreement on what constitutes adequate training. Even if agreement were reached among practitioners, there is no support structure available to provide or even permit much training to be done. In most cases, the states and others supporting efforts to improve adult skills have simply not invested the resources necessary to provide effective professional development for instructors, volunteers or program managers.

Programs are operating on shoestring budgets. In most cases, programs are not required to provide training for their staffs. The demand for literacy services is compelling; time-off and resources devoted to training would require reductions in service, so program administrators and funders choose to expand services before providing training to service delivery personnel. In-service training and skill enhancement are most often done on the instructor's own time and expense. Because of the historic lack of agreement on the skills required for adult literacy instruction and because of the lack of standards imposed by federal or state governments, "adult literacy instructors tend to be chosen for their characteristics as concerned, caring individuals more than for specific instructional skill or training." 9/

While the training required of staff varies greatly from local program to local program, some generalizations can be made:

Adult Education Programs

The criteria used in programs funded through the federal Adult Education Act in nineteen states are those required for teacher certification in the state. The remaining thirty-one states enforce no particular certification requirements for adult educators. 10/ The assumption behind the federally supported adult education approach is that if you can teach, you can teach an adult. Approximately 60 percent of instructors in these programs are people moonlighting from elementary or secondary education teaching jobs. Because of the difficulty in finding teachers, coupled with the lack of any formal training requirements in most of the states, program managers settle for either demonstrated teaching skills or an expression of concern or caring as the operational prerequisites. For English as a Second Language (ESL) programs operated under the Adult Education Act, bilingualism is not a federal prerequisite for teachers. In fact, bilingualism is required in only a very few ESL programs operating across the country.

In-service training requirements are minimal and largely consist of voluntary attendance at group discussions, lectures or seminars. These sessions are episodic in nature and are offered as free standing programs rather than as part of a continuum of training. No standards exist which specify qualifications for those providing instruction. Released time is not provided for attendance. These minimal requirements are often met by offering conferences that can be attended on a voluntary, non-reimbursable basis by local adult literacy program staff. Several states, California, Connecticut, New Mexico and Virginia, for example, have used Section 353 (formerly Section 310) of the Adult Education Act to address training, innovation and staff development needs on a more formal basis.

Community-based Programs

No specific set of pre-service or in-service training requirements exists for community-based programs. Variations in requirements among these programs is more a function of the funding sources than of philosophical approach. Particular skills required as prerequisites to practice have not been stipulated for community-based programs, although these programs place a premium on community knowledge, background, and experience. 11/ Training opportunities provided for staff members of community-oriented programs are often directed to help staff "unlearn" formal training they may have received in favor of an approach as facilitator and advocate. 12/ Selection requirements for community-oriented programs tend to be more academically flexible than in federally funded adult education programs, and more rigorous than in volunteer tutoring programs.

The Association for Community Based Education has developed a training program for community-based program staff that now is being tested. It was developed with the assistance

of persons working in community-based programs for the purpose of improving teaching and facilitating techniques, not for purposes of certification or barring entrance to the field.

Volunteer Tutoring Programs

Volunteer tutoring programs usually require minimal formal educational attainment and focus instead on a commitment to stay with the program. Typically, 14-20 hours of pre-service orientation is provided to a tutor. There are no formal in-service training requirements. Contact with other tutors and administrative personnel is offered through informal meetings or other gatherings for group discussions or lectures.

Workplace Literacy Programs

Employers offering workplace literacy programs frequently establish liaisons with community colleges or public schools, so they are in most cases dealing with the same orientation and talent pool as federally funded adult education programs. Very few firms have their own in-house instructional staff. While the prerequisites for instruction are typically those required for elementary and secondary education, the orientation required by the firm is highly contextual and job related. Instructors are required to help learners take what they know and apply it to a new job task. As in federally funded adult education programs, participation in in-service training programs is voluntary and done on the time and at the expense of the instructor.

Military Programs

The only prerequisite for adult literacy instruction in the military is the possession of a college degree. The subject matter is not an issue. Because of the highly rigid curriculum used, the military claims that it can take any college graduate and train him or her to be a literacy instructor. In-service training is limited to updating the instructor with any changes made in the curriculum.

While education and training prerequisites and in-service training requirements are minimal for most literacy programs, prerequisites for administrative staff are non-existent. Federally funded adult education program administrative staff are typically vocational educational directors or federal program directors in local education agencies or community colleges. With backgrounds in skills such as TV or radio repair or federal grantsmanship, they are frequently even less prepared than instructors. Because responsibility for the adult literacy program may be an add-on to a large array of other responsibilities, administrators may be more committed to other programs, or may lack the time or resources to become fully aware of program training requirements for adult literacy enhancement services.

The lack of funds for staff development and training and the lack of an institutional commitment to training on the part of the major funders of adult literacy services result in local

administrative decisions to meet minimal requirements at limited or no cost. Many training sessions are put on, for example, by book publishers or computer companies which have either limited grounding in adult literacy issues or a compelling interest in selling a particular product. These programs could be quite useful if offered in the context of a broader training program. However, planners and administrators simply do not have the background and knowledge necessary to use the resource base that is available to upgrade the quality of instruction in the field.

Despite the lack of training and availability of professional development resources, teachers and administrators have been struggling hard to upgrade the skills of adults. Their problems in producing the outcomes that policymakers desire are not rooted in lack of dedication or intelligence. Rather, the difficulties faced by service providers in sustaining the interest of adults and in helping them learn new skills quickly are based on the lack of appropriate orientation and training and the lack of institutional support and resources to obtain and apply the most effective techniques of teaching adults.

While no consensus exists on the level of education and training necessary for persons serving as staff or volunteers in adult literacy enhancement programs, an increasing number of people now believe that supervised teaching and in-service training are critical factors. 13/ Of equal importance, however, is resolving the question of what type of training should be provided. Research has not shown any relationship between higher levels of the types of training that are now provided and increased learning gains of adults. But, research results do suggest elements of an orientation and training program that appear to make a difference. 14/ The type of training required is discussed at greater length in "Resolving the Conundrum" below.

In a Ford Foundation report on adult literacy, Harman maintains that "teachers require ongoing training to adjust their thinking and practice from a traditional (reading as decoding) model to one that truly connects learner-context-text-and-response." 15/ Guidelines for effective literacy programs developed under a project sponsored by B. Dalton Bookseller state that "a literacy program should offer pre-service training to instructional and non-instructional staff that is suited to their skills and experience... and should offer in-service training to instructors and other staff that continually improves their effectiveness in working with the program's adult learners." 16/ Arlene Fingeret, a professor in adult and community education at North Carolina State University concludes: "Experience has taught continuing educators that placing an enthusiastic, caring teacher in the classroom will not, in itself, produce desired results." 17/

THE MISSING INFRASTRUCTURE

Even though there is agreement among the leaders in adult literacy in the nation that pre- and in-service training are needed, the fact remains that there is no support system for professional development in the field of adult literacy. Indeed, in the sense that other professions are organized, adult basic skills instruction has not developed into a profession or "field" at all. 18/ Instructors are not encouraged to advance their skills, in part because there has been no agreement about the skills necessary for adult literacy instruction. Some policymakers still believe the myth that specific knowledge about adult education is unnecessary for successful instruction. Recent research and practice in the field has shattered this myth but many programs are still operating as if it were true. Until the infrastructure for staff development and training are provided in the field of adult literacy, "adult education will continue to be viewed as an opportunity to help someone else using human qualities — compassion, caring, sensitivity — rather than as an opportunity for continuing professional learning, growth and development." 19/

Leaders in the field of adult literacy have concluded that pre- and in-service training are required if programs are to be more useful to potential learners. Leaders in the field have further concluded that the type of preparation and training must be different from that currently provided for traditional elementary and secondary teaching jobs. Most practitioners in the field of adult literacy agree wholeheartedly with these conclusions. Yet, practice continues as if these conclusions had not been reached. Why? The answer relates primarily to the approach to adult literacy taken by federal and state policymakers.

In other related fields, a premium is placed on education and training, and support is built into the delivery system to encourage and require upgrading of skills. No such situation exists in the field of adult literacy. Policymakers have not placed the required premium on education and training in part because they have been reluctant to accept the associated costs and in part because they like the simplicity and appeal of volunteers as a solution. If national policy goals are to be reached, policymakers must be willing to invest in the required professional development infrastructure.

Despite several decades of activity, adult literacy is still a fledgling field. The lack of a support structure for the advancement of professional skills has been a major contributor to the slow pace of advancement in the state of the art. The field is caught in a vicious cycle. State of the art practices will not be advanced unless the field is professionalized and the field cannot be professionalized unless practitioners are brought up the level of the current state of the art.

An answer to this conundrum must be found. We can proceed if we have a better understanding of the extent and scope of structural problems in the field today:

The Field of Adult Literacy Lacks a Common Orientation and a Common Basis of Knowledge Rooted in Basic and Applied Research and Experience.

In order for the quality of education and training for adult literacy instructors to be improved, some basis of agreement on the common elements of skills needed by instructors must be reached. Literacy instructors and administrators often feel that such agreement is thwarted by the fact that participants in literacy programs come from widely diverse backgrounds and with many different goals for which enhanced literacy skills are needed. To respond to these different backgrounds and goals and to the differences in skill levels, they maintain that different instructional skills are needed. In fact, however, the essential underlying skill in this example is the ability to recognize and appreciate the varying life circumstances, skills and goals of the learner and to construct a program of skill upgrading that accommodates these differences. There is a foundation for agreement on the common elements of skills needed by instructors that can be derived from the literature on adult literacy and from practitioners in the field, but no mechanism has existed to translate this information into practice.

Most Literacy Programs Do Not Have Quality Standards for What Happens in the Classroom.

The field must define standards of practice. Common elements of good practice can be derived from the field and from the existing research base and used as interim standards while a concerted effort is applied to the development of more formal standards of practice for the field. The adoption of even interim standards of practice would do much to provide a common goal toward which adult literacy programs could move without sacrificing differences in approach.

Literacy Programs Are Low Budget Operations with Limited Funds for Staff Development and Training, Instructional Materials and Self-evaluation.

The lack of adequate funds for staff development and training, and the lack of requirements for pre- and in-service training perpetuates the myth that training is not required in order to teach adults. Requirements to provide training and funds to support it must be built into existing programs to provide an environment of expectation of performance improvement and a capacity to advance the state of the art.

Historically, most instructional materials used in adult literacy programs were adaptations of materials developed for use with children. Experience has shown great limitations on the usefulness of these materials. In the last 10 years, many adult-oriented materials have been developed. As we learn more about how adults learn and what types of

materials are most useful in capturing and sustaining their interest, we should be stimulating the development of more and better instructional materials. This can only be done if there is a market for the products. The existence of a market is dependent on the availability of funds for the purchase of such materials. Building funds into existing programs for the purchase of instructional materials specifically developed for adults would focus staff attention on this need and would stimulate materials development.

Studies have shown that few programs engage in any systematic fashion in program evaluation. Because of the dearth of information on the elements of adult literacy programs which result in practically significant learning gains, the field continues to pursue program approaches which at best yield marginal gains and at worst yield bitter disappointment for learners and waste public funds and volunteer time. To move adult literacy programs toward increasing effectiveness, evaluation must be built into every phase of program operation. Further, a culture of self-evaluation and improvement must be instilled in all adult literacy staff.

Compensation Levels for Adult Literacy Program Staff Are Lower than in Comparable Fields of Education and No Career Path Exists for Advancement.

The going rate for literacy instructors is between $9.00 and $12.00 per hour. In some areas, the rate is as low as $6.00 per hour and in some urban and suburban areas the rate approaches $20.00 per hour. In most cases, this rate applies only to in-class teaching time, not preparation time. Jobs are overwhelmingly part-time with no benefits and with no opportunities to build a career. No incentives exist for employees to commit themselves to upgrading their skills. Consequently, people attracted to the field are primarily those with other full-time jobs seeking to increase their earnings or persons who only want part-time work. These are not usually persons likely to want to make adult literacy a career. Even if they were inclined to make adult education a career, programs are not now organized to offer them full-time employment or advancement in a field. If salaries were made commensurate with other comparable jobs in the teaching profession, and if more full-time positions were made available, career paths could be developed and support could be provided for skill upgrading.

Administrative Staff in the Field of Adult Literacy Frequently Devote only Part-time to Literacy Programs.

Staff responsible for the administration of adult basic education programs in local education agencies and community colleges also typically are responsible for the administration of other programs. Adult basic education administration is more often than not an add-on to an existing array of responsibilities. Administrators are not required to be trained

in the field of adult literacy education and are rarely aware of the increasing knowledge base which could guide the operation of these programs. Frequently, administrators also lack basic management skills as well. The lack of orientation and training in the subject of adult literacy education further compounds the isolation and low status afforded these programs.

Adult Literacy Programs Suffer from a Limited Network for Information Sharing.

In its 1986 report, the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative indicated that the single most common technical assistance request related to staff development was for more networking. 20/ The New York City program is not alone in its perception of this need. Because of limited resources and limited attention to professional development needs of the field, the concept of building a network for information sharing has not been realized. An institution or organization which can assist in the transfer of best practices to and among programs, keep abreast of the state of the art and provide relevant information to local programs, transfer research findings into practice and share other information would do much to stimulate programs to advance the state of the art. Without such a resource, each program operates essentially on its own. Several states have used Section 353 (formerly Section 310) funds of the Adult Education Act to create resource centers for adult literacy. More of this type of activity is needed.

Literacy Enhancement Programs Are Often Generic in Nature Rather than Directed to a Specific and Quantifiable Goal Shared by the Learner.

Research has shown that learners do best when there is a clear relationship between what is being taught and achievement of their own goals. Programs with the best holding capacity seem to be those where completion of a literacy or skills improvement program is directly related to a personal goal of the learner such as employment retention or job advancement; that is, where the need for skill improvement is recognized clearly by the participant and where an incentive exists for upgrading his or her skills. 21/

A direct relationship is not often established between the program's goals and factors motivating the learner to seek literacy instruction. As a result, the prospective learner may not see an immediate pay-off for the investment in skill improvement. Many programs have attempted to sell literacy services on the proposition that enhanced literacy skills will lead to a "better life" for the learner. In part because a better life is never defined in terms specific to and valued by the learner, high drop-out rates occur.

Literacy programs lack the infrastructure to support the advancement of the skills of literacy staff. There are no incentives built into the existing system of service provision to advance the state of the art. Consequently, each institutional approach to literacy enhancement builds upon itself without serious questioning, overemphasizes its successes and struggles to

provide more of the same with limited resources. The system is a bastard-child of the educational system — isolated from the mainstream, deprived of adequate resources for healthy growth and development and as currently structured with limited hope for the future.

RESOLVING THE CONUNDRUM

In order to advance the state of the art, we must build a profession. In order to build a profession, we must infuse knowledge of the state of the art into the minds of literacy practitioners. To do this, we must begin to quantify the state of the art and determine the best ways of translating this information into practice.

Perhaps the most important prerequisite for advancing the state of the art is understanding that adult literacy instruction is in an evolutionary process. Much information is available that should now be translated into practice. There is much yet to be learned by examining practice and determining the causal factors for success and failure.

The practice of literacy education is not conducive to the development of one pedagogy. If we have learned one thing about literacy instruction for adults it is that it must be contextually-based. Motivation for adults is not the same as motivation for children. Adults are not content to sit in traditional classrooms and appreciate learning for its sake alone. Adults are motivated to increase their literacy skills because they have experienced a problem the resolution of which is important to them and which requires skill enhancement in order to solve.

The environment within which each adult perceives this need differs from the next. Programs to assist workers in upgrading their skills, for example, must be structured and operated in very different ways from programs designed to help welfare mothers gain basic skills in order to qualify for further job training. They both must rely on similar standards of practice but must be oriented in very different ways if the goals of the individual learners are to be achieved. The field must recognize and support approaches to solving these problems which are tailored to the differing contexts in which literacy services are needed.

The practice of adult literacy instruction requires an environment which supports the upgrading of the profession without sacrificing creativity and without promoting rigidity. To upgrade the quality of practice and the performance of programs, literacy instructors need to be provided with a framework for thinking about their work. "They need to be challenged to think about why they do what they do, and they need to be provided with the opportunity to generate alternatives." 22/ This is the context in which training for literacy staff should be pursued.

Many persons in the field of adult literacy have worked on the development of required sets of competencies for adult literacy staff. Virtually all of these efforts have arrived at a list of competencies as defined by those practicing in the program without regard to a careful examination of the strengths, weaknesses or success rates of various approaches. While different lists of competencies include many of the same components, they are often quite extensive, difficult to convert into practice and include many items of questionable value when viewed in the context of what works in adult literacy enhancement programs.

Rather than begin with long and complicated lists of competencies derived from programs with limited success rates, it seems more practical and productive to start from what we know works in adult literacy instruction — to begin to quantify the state of the art. A set of standards or specifications for practice for adult literacy staff can be developed that are applicable to all adult literacy programs, regardless of orientation. That is, based on research and practical experience, we can extrapolate from what works in adult literacy programs to standards for adult literacy staff. (See Brizius & Foster, 1987, for a summary of the "state of the art" in adult literacy programs.) 23/

These quality standards can be grouped into four categories and summarized as follows:

Standards Related to What Should Be Taught:

Literacy staff should be well versed in the "portable skills" approach to literacy enhancement. All levels of literacy staff, including instructors, facilitators, volunteers, aides and administrators should be knowledgeable about the latest information available which suggests what approach should be used in helping a person upgrade his or her skills. Instructors should be oriented, through instructional experimentation, to the development of a curriculum that teaches the underlying skills and strategies required in everyday literacy tasks.

This involves a very different approach to literacy instruction than the traditional academic approach or even the more recent functional competency-based approach. The traditional approach to literacy education has been to teach basic and intermediate encoding and decoding, either in an academic or functional context. 24/ In this approach, reading is viewed as one skill, writing as another; history as a separate subject from geography or health. This approach is based on the assumption that there are blocks of knowledge and information that the learner lacks and that this knowledge can be separated into discrete packages and transferred to the learner. The unstated assumption of this approach is that these skills can be learned and then applied by the learner in all aspects of life.

This is the approach taken by the elementary and secondary schools. It has already failed with most of the adult population with limited literacy skills. Further, work done by

Stitch with the military shows that even when gains are made using this approach, within six weeks 80 percent of the gains are lost unless the skills taught were applied to regular life situations. Finally, the assumption that the skills acquired by this approach will then be generalized appears to be incorrect in light of the National Assessment for Educational Progress study of literacy among young adults. This study showed that there was only about a 25 percent ability to generalize knowledge from one skill to a related skill area. Even if an adult were sufficiently motivated to acquire the discrete skills that he or she was unable to acquire in school, the utility of simple acquisition of these skills alone is highly questionable, particularly in light of employers demands for workers whose skills enable them to change and adapt to change.

In response to the concern that literacy include the ability to perform certain tasks as well as possess specific bodies of knowledge, many programs began to focus all or part of their instruction on functional or competency-based education. Most literacy programs today build into their curricula opportunities to apply basic skills to problems of daily life 25/; however, the focus of instruction is still on the acquisition of skills associated with a discrete task. This approach seems to retain more people in the programs than the traditional academic approach but some critics argue that a focus on the acquisition of particular functional skills may not provide adequate training in basic encoding and decoding.

This approach narrows the field of information to be imparted and thus reduces the time required for instruction. Given the large amounts of time required to acquire basic skills, some policymakers opt for narrowing the focus to immediate life situations of the learner, once again optimistically assuming that the learned skills can be generalized to other aspects of life. The major criticism of this approach is that it simply extends the academic approach to literacy to a broader array of individual and specific tasks,without providing the basic problem-solving skills that would enable the learner to generalize to situations not anticipated in the classroom. 26/ Thus, the skills learned are not really portable.

The "portable skills" approach is based on the assumption that being literate in today's society is not just a function of ability to encode and decode or perform separate and discrete tasks, but is rather a function of problem-solving or information-processing skills. 27/ It is based on the assumption that reading and writing or, for example, deciphering a particular schedule or table is not sufficient in and of itself. Rather, the acquisition of skills in such a way as to enable application of the knowledge in varying and changing situations of everyday life is the essential component of literacy in today's society. Proponents of this approach view the use of functional competency applications as essential to teaching a set of portable skills. They specify basic problem-solving and information-processing skills and then use a

functional approach to convey them, always being cognizant that the functional applications are just examples of how the underlying skills might be applied. The best evidence to date strongly suggests that imparting portable skills in a functional context is the best investment that can be made. 28/

The concept of portable skills should be thoroughly infused in the thinking and practices of literacy staff. The best example of the portable skills approach to literacy is reflected in an assessment instrument rather than in a program design. the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) study of literacy measured literacy skills in young adults in terms of three different aspects of literacy:

Prose literacy — the knowledge and skills needed to understand and use information from texts that include editorials, articles, letters, poems and the like;

Document literacy — the knowledge and skills required to locate and use information contained in job applications or payroll forms, bus schedules, maps, tables, indexes, and so forth; and,

Quantitative literacy — the knowledge and skills needed to apply arithmetic operations, either alone or sequentially, that are embedded in printed materials, such as balancing a checkbook, figuring out a discount, completing an order form, or determining the amount of interest form a loan advertisement. 29/

Implementing the portable skills approach will be an evolutionary process. Many programs have already rejected or modified the traditional academic approach to literacy enhancement for adults and have adopted functional competency approaches. Building on these changes, literacy professionals can train instructors and program managers in methods of instruction that teach a set of underlying skills through practice on a number of functional problems relevant to the real lives of adults. This means that the staff of literacy programs also will have to be contextually trained so that the functional examples used are appropriate to the workplace or environment where the skills will be used. States and other providers and funders will have to invest in learning materials and course materials that stress the portable skills approach. Technologies that stress teaching portable skills in the context of specific jobs should also be preferred over more generic learning systems when programs and policymakers are choosing new technology based systems.

Literacy program administrators should be skilled in the basics of program management. In addition to being exposed to the other standards of practice, adult literacy program administrators must be knowledgeable about management practices and techniques. They should be familiar with various funding sources for literacy enhancement activities and know how to combine program funds to create a local program Finally, they should be

conversant with technologies that can assist in skill acquisition and know how to plan and allocate costs to insure that the necessary technologies are acquired.

Standards Related to Who Will Be Taught:

Literacy staff should be skilled in taking into account the particular needs, problems and life circumstances of the learner in tailoring literacy enhancement programs to meet individual needs. While it is true that all teachers need to be sensitive to the individual needs of their students, adult educators must be particularly aware of the motivations of students and they must be trained in techniques of motivating adults to continue in what may become a long and arduous process of learning. Instructors, aides and volunteers should be able to discern changing needs and goals of the learner and be sensitive to their needs. They should be able to tailor literacy instruction and materials to accommodate both the goals of the learner and the barriers to literacy enhancement. Adult literacy program administrators should be appreciative of the needs to assure that such tailoring is accomplished.

Literacy staff should be sure that their approach to adult learning is responsive to adult goals, not derivative of the way we tend to teach children. They should also be trained to recognize that adults do not represent a monolithic entity but rather a wide diversity in learning styles, skill levels and learning problems. Literacy staff should be familiar with a range of approaches to adult education that work for adults.

Literacy staff should demonstrate a cultural awareness and appreciation of the backgrounds and ethnicity of learners. According to most researchers, the ability of adult literacy providers to relate to the culture and background of adults is very important both to communication with adult learners and to improving motivation. As one researchers put it: "Respect for how learners see their world and what they can contribute as well as what they may wish to learn is an essential basis of education." 30/ Literacy staff must be familiar with the culture and values of the learner, must tailor programs to the life experiences of the learner, and must appreciate and build upon the existing base of knowledge and skills brought to the program.

Standards Related to Methods and Techniques:

Literacy staff should be conversant with various methods of instruction and should be able to match the method with the needs of the learner. Literacy staff should be aware of the range of methods of instruction and should be able to select particular methods that hold the most promise in the context of how, why and what each individual needs to learn. Over the years, various methods of instruction have moved in and out of fashion. As David Harman states, if a century of debate has not produced a conclusive decision about the best teaching method, perhaps we are asking the wrong question. The fact is that people can and do learn to

read using all sorts of methods. The key to their success appears to lie in factors other than the specific instructional method used — factors such as motivation of the learner, a clear relationship between the personal goals of the learner and the goals of the program, a supportive learning environment, or a clear relationship of the subject matter being taught to its utility in other life situations.

The instructor should also be knowledgeable about various computer-based or computer-aided instructional materials and be able to evaluate them in terms of how well they can contribute to the learning goal. The computer is a valuable tool for self-paced instruction. Computer-aided instructional materials should be developed to provide a broad range of experiences in which problem solving and information processing skills can be learned.

Literacy instructors, aides and volunteers should possess good communications skills and should be able to orient them to specific groups of adults. Like other teachers, all persons involved with helping others upgrade their literacy skills should be able to communicate effectively, should possess good listening skills, and should be able to select and organize material for presentation to the learner so as to build upon the learners existing knowledge base. Training for literacy professionals should stress communications skills, especially listening for motivations of adults and barriers to learning. While it may seem trivially obvious that teachers be able to communicate effectively, the point is worth repeating because the techniques of communication necessary for reaching one group of adults may be far different from those needed to reach another group. In addition, the techniques of communication used by successful teachers of adults differ substantially from those needed to teach a class of sixth graders.

Literacy staff should be aware of the relationship between the environment where learning takes place and the comfort and motivation of the learner. Given that literacy instruction for adults must be contextually based and that progress is best achieved in the context of meeting another goal, it follows that the environment for literacy instruction is related to the comfort level of the learner. The setting of literacy programs is important as it relates to proximity and access and as a symbol of the relationship of the program to the learner's personal goal. Literacy staff should be cognizant of the fact that the setting of the program can be used as a tool to support and reinforce the learner.

Standards Related to Assessment and Evaluation:

Literacy staff should be able to assess the skill level of the learner in the context of what is to be taught and how far the individual needs to progress. Literacy staff must be knowledgeable about the range of assessment tools available and their relationship to the content of and approach to instruction used in their particular program. The choice of a

particular assessment tool is dependent on a decision about what to measure. Literacy program staff members must be able to specify where an individual fits on the literacy continuum and to select an assessment tool that can measure and document progress in moving up the scale toward the individual's goal.

Literacy staff must be able to build into their curricula the ability to judge effectiveness. Literacy staff must be able to assess routinely progress of learners, to determine when the learner has acquired the needed skills, and to determine the effectiveness of individual program components, including the effectiveness of their own individual and programmatic efforts.

If the field of adult literacy would adopt even these general standards for instruction, a significant step could be taken toward the building of a common framework for advancement of the profession. These standards would provide a common direction for increased performance. They would allow flexibility in the emphasis placed on each of the standards depending on the auspices of the program, and they would be broad enough to allow considerable experimentation necessary to advance the state of the art.

To make significant advances in the performance of adult literacy programs, we must infuse existing programs with the current state of the art knowledge. To do this, we must build an infrastructure which will support the upgrading of the profession and attention to performance. To accomplish this task, resources must be redirected, new resources must be made available and political as well as financial support must be forthcoming.

CREATING A PROFESSION

Adopting a set of standards which reflects the state of the art and working to refine and enhance them is necessary but not sufficient for the creation of a profession. To create a profession, we need to accomplish three additional and crucial tasks. First, we need to create an institutional infrastructure to support professional development. This institutional infrastructure should include mechanisms to insure staff training in the state of the art, disseminate best practices, and engage in applied research to find better ways to improve the skills of adults. Second, we need to change the culture of literacy providers — to help adult literacy staff understand that there is a body of knowledge that makes a difference and to apply that knowledge to their teaching and administration. Third, we need to provide the resources to the teachers and administrators so that they can take advantage of training and professional development opportunities. Literacy practitioners should be major contributors to an action based research agenda that will result in the development of more informed training practices.

In all professions, part of the purpose of the profession is to advance knowledge about

the most effective practices in the field. This must be particularly true with regard to a new profession of adult basic skills. Research and practice has provided the field of adult literacy with a direction in which to proceed, but it has not yet provided a complete road map of how to proceed. Experimentation and creativity must be encouraged. An environment must be created wherein each instructor, aide, volunteer or administrator constantly reflects on what he or she is doing, asks himself/herself why and questions what improvements could be made in order to achieve the goals of the learner. Standards of practice must be adopted and constantly refined. Contextually-based models must be devised for many different situations and learning goals. Programs to increase public awareness of the need for literacy skill enhancement must be initiated and incentives must be created for participation in literacy programs. Above all, the test of performance must be the test of whether the profession is succeeding.

Unlike some other professions where the body of knowledge is more substantial and the standards of practice are well known, the professional activities associated with adult literacy should not revolve around certification or restricting entry into the profession. Instead, the profession will have to be more experimental and open to innovation. Dissemination of innovations and best practices, creating new training programs and sharing successful experiences will characterize this new profession more closely than the structured activities usually associated with established professions such as law or medicine.

To make significant headway in enhancing adult literacy, we cannot focus entirely on the profession. We must also recognize that significant advances in learning gains will be dependent on helping learners identify their need for skill enhancement and take advantage of basic skill programs.

In order to create the necessary infrastructure and an environment which stimulates progress, the following actions are proposed:

<u>Exert Leadership at all Levels of Government, the Private and Voluntary Sectors, to Change the Rhetoric of Adult Literacy</u>

Myths related to the ease of instruction and acquisition of skills, as well as the nature of literacy itself must be dispelled and replaced by a frank admission and discussion of the state of the art. It is no longer acceptable to promote the theme that anyone can teach another to be literate. Neither is it acceptable to assume that more elementary and secondary education teachers can solve the problem. Policymakers must avoid the trap of easy and simplistic "solutions" that eventually waste public funds and dash the hopes of millions needing help. It is time to speak frankly about the complexity of the problem, the fact that literacy skill improvement takes a long time, and the fact that it will cost more to do right.

Even in the best of circumstances, literacy gains are slow in coming. Many hours of instruction are required for significant skill advancement. Learning time is measured in years rather than in weeks or months. Programs and staff must be able to hold on to learners for long periods of time. Ironically, one of the effects of increased awareness of the problem of adult literacy has been increasing pressure on existing programs to expand services with little or no appropriate training for staff providing those services. Faced with the choice of spending limited resources on training or increasing enrollments, program managers are naturally choosing to serve more people. Unfortunately, running more people through the existing service system without exerting special efforts to improve teaching practices may only degrade the quality of the system and will certainly not lead to an improvement in program effectiveness in the long run. If political leaders and advocates would demand not only more services but also higher quality services for adults, the resources for training and professional development could be more easily obtained and allocated.

Reorient all Existing Adult Literacy Programs to Quality Standards

Staff in all adult literacy programs operating today should be exposed to state of the art knowledge and held accountable for meeting quality standards listed above. While most of these standards seem as though they should be found in most programs, few programs now implement training and professional development activities to ensure that these standards are met. Existing programs should be redirected to meet specific goals related to workforce preparation, acquisition of ESL skills and goals related to family, community and governmental participation. Program goals must be directly related to individual goals of the learners. The existing array of adult literacy programs should be converted into a performance-based system which advances program quality.

Build Requirements for Pre-service and In-service Training into Federal, State and Local Grant Programs

All federal programs providing funds that are used for adult literacy (including but not limited to Adult Education Act, the Job Training and Partnership Act, the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act and the Family Support Act of 1988) should include requirements for pre-service and on-going in-service training for all instructional, facilitative, volunteer and administrative staff. This training should be focused, at a minimum, on bringing staff up to the quality standards defined above. This training should be practice-based not academically-based. Training should stress the best practices as identified by federal, state and community-based research. Federal programs should further require that responsibility for providing such training and assuring competence in meeting these standards be the responsibility of the states.

These same federal programs should include in their funding allocations additional funds to enable programs to meet these training requirements, including time release for attendance at training programs and conferences, coverage of participation costs and differential pay for trained staff. Each program should include a set aside of 6 percent of program funds to be used for adult literacy staff development and training at the operating program level. State and local governments should be strongly encouraged to include such requirements into their programming as well.

Training should be provided by persons well versed in the state of the art who will teach in ways that provide models of instruction most appropriate for adult learners. The use of training programs designed for the elementary and secondary education system should be rejected as inadequate. Training programs should stimulate literacy staff to reflect on their own practice and to strive to contribute to improvement in the state of the art.

Designate the States as the Responsible Entities for Assuring That Literacy Staff Have Received Instruction in the State of the Art and Have Demonstrated Proficiency in Each of the Areas

State governments should assume the capacity-building and regulatory functions that will be required to enable programs to implement quality standards. The states should be responsible for assuring that all programs which receive federal or state funds meet quality standards. Community-oriented and volunteer programs also should be encouraged to adopt these criteria for facilitator or tutor preparation, and should be required to demonstrate proficiency of literacy staff if they are to receive federal or state funds. States should also encourage employers to inculcate the state of the art criteria in preparing instructors for workplace training programs.

Training programs should be required for paid and volunteer instructional staff and administrative staff. Programs might be modeled after principals' academies that have been created for elementary and school principals. They would be designed to improve practice in the field through a range of experiential and innovative practices. Training programs should not be operated under the auspices of the elementary and secondary education system and certification in elementary and secondary education should not be sufficient grounds for approval as an adult literacy instructor or administrator.

States should either develop such training programs themselves or contract for them. If states choose not to provide these services directly, they should identify and approve those training programs which will provide the requisite training for adult literacy staff. The standards of practice presented above should be adopted as interim standards of quality until basic and applied research permits the development of a better informed set of criteria. Until

more is known about the prerequisites for effective staff, formal certification should not required or granted, but states should work toward the development of standards of practice that might be an appropriate basis for certification in the future.

In the interim, the states should keep the system for professional development as flexible and as outcome driven as possible by linking continued designation as an approved training program to the success of clients in programs for which they have provided training.

Provide Federal Support for the Development of State Staff Development Training and Information Dissemination Centers for Adult Literacy in Each State

State professional resource centers would function as the primary institutional capacity for technical assistance and technology transfer to accomplish staff development, training and replication of best programs and practices. Centers for training now exist in five states and have been funded primarily by Section 353 (formerly Section 310) of the Adult Education Act. These funds, while appropriate for start-up of new and innovative staff development and training activities, are not sufficient to cover costs, particularly in the smaller states. New funding would be required to operate centers. They should be supported primarily by state funds. These centers should focus on the development of resources for staff development and training in many different settings and toward many different goals. To avoid existing institutional biases, they should operate as free-standing entities rather than under the auspices of existing institutional structures.

State centers would be responsible for identifying the training needs of local program staff — both instructional personnel and administrators — and for arranging professional development activities and programs specifically designed to meet these needs. To perform this function, the centers would draw on the resources of a national center for adult learning described below. The centers would also work cooperatively with state colleges and universities, business and industrial trainers, and other training resource personnel to coordinate their professional development activities with other resources in the state and to stimulate the development of effective pre-service professional development programs.

State centers also would serve as state clearinghouses for new approaches to staff development and training. Center staff would assist practitioners in identifying and adopting exemplary programs and practices appropriate to the learning needs of those they serve. Information on state of the art practices would be made available to the centers through research results, a close working relationships with a national center for adult learning and from other state centers.

In order to assist states in "jump-starting" the development of an infrastructure for staff development and training, grant assistance should be provided from the federal government to

provide a base for program development. The base amount should be approximately $400,000 per center for several years. Incentives should be provided for states to form multi-state centers so that a critical core of resources might be amassed to serve two or more states. The federal government should provide additional funds for small states that agree to cooperate in forming multi-state training capacities. These centers should work closely with a national center for adult learning.

Encourage State University Systems to Develop Programs in Adult Literacy

To add credibility to the profession and advance the state of the art, state universities should be challenged and encouraged to develop adult education programs oriented to the literacy skills of adults. The creation of university centers for adult literacy could bolster development in the field and direct talent to needed research related to practice in the field. Such research could be stimulated by state and federal grants. These centers should not be tied to the current elementary and secondary education programs and should not be used as barriers to entry into the field.

Strengthen and Support the Development of Existing National Adult Literacy Associations

To promote the upgrading of the field of adult literacy and to further encourage networking and transfer of good ideas, national associations should be supported and strengthened. A national association should study the issue of certification of adult literacy staff as a means to further advance the professional levels of adult education practitioners. In addition, state resource centers should provide seed funds for statewide professional associations of adult literacy providers.

Increase Levels of Compensation for Adult Literacy Staff

In order to attract high quality personnel to the field, compensation levels must be made competitive with those in other related parts of the economy. Much attention has been paid nationally to the need to increase levels of compensation for the elementary and secondary teaching profession in order to attract and retain good teachers. While the field of adult literacy should decidedly not mirror the methods and techniques adopted by its sister system, the concerns about levels of compensation are applicable to both. A necessary condition to creating and advancing a profession is providing competitive pay and providing the potential for increased remuneration as skills are advanced.

Pay should be increased on an hourly basis at least to the levels earned by other comparable jobs in the teaching profession. Teaching adults is demanding and requires training, although of a very different sort. Pay increases should not be granted, however, in programs that do not meet or exceed the standards of quality described in this paper. In order

to allow salaries to be increased, state reimbursement rates or rates for performance must be raised.

Create a National Center for Adult Learning

A national center for adult learning should be created and, as part of a much larger set of responsibilities, should assume a leadership role in developing state of the art models and materials for training literacy instructors/facilitators and administrators. It should commission studies on best practices in all sectors of adult literacy instruction and widely publish the results. It should develop training materials and make these available to states in the development of their training programs. It should also function as a national clearinghouse on staff development and training for adult literacy.

Orient all Research and Practice to Accountability in the Field

Accountability in training must be linked directly to accountability in teaching and skill acquisition. Performance standards for teachers must be related directly to movement of learners along the literacy continuum. The entire literacy enhancement field must be turned into field research for effective programs, including criteria for effective instruction. All programs should be required to build a strong capability for self-evaluation program examines all elements of program operation and learner performance including staff performance.

While these actions are necessary to improve practice, they will remain insufficient without further action to motivate learners. Two additional actions are required to help individuals realize the need for enhancement of their literacy skills and to provide incentives to them to take advantage of improved programs: 31/

Educate the Public of the Need to Increase Literacy Skills

Most public awareness programs today focus on the needs of persons with extremely limited skills. The larger problem facing our nation today is upgrading skills of those who consider themselves to be literate but who in fact lack the higher levels of skills needed to function in the workplace, help their children with their school work and assure the health and safety of their families. As the literacy requirements of society increase, growing enclaves of very vulnerable and very dependent people see a gradual erosion of the quality of their lives. 32/ This nation faces a major task in changing our understanding of the nature of literacy and the need for skill enhancement. Efforts to help people realize their need for increased basic skills can most effectively be handled through the media and in the workplace.

Experiment with Incentive Systems for Individuals to Upgrade their Literacy Skills

A range of incentives, primarily negative incentives, are now being tried to increase literacy skills of those with very low levels of basic skills. For example, West Virginia has enacted a law which denies drivers licenses to individuals of school age who drop out of high

school. Virginia has instituted a no read no release program which offers differential parole opportunities for those who participate in literacy programs. Wisconsin is experimenting with school-fare where children receiving AFDC who have high truancy levels are denied a portion of their grants. Florida has enacted a program which requires teenage mothers who receive AFDC to participate in literacy enhancement programs as a condition of receipt of the grant. No data is available on the effects of these programs on the level or rate of skill acquisition of the learners.

Other incentive programs can be envisioned, not all negative. Tax incentives could be provided to businesses to work with persons who need to upgrade their basic skills. Persons could receive payment while participating in literacy programs. Stipends could be provided for literacy training of individuals to work with their children. Higher unemployment compensation benefits might be provided to persons who engage in basic skills training. By envisioning a full list of reasons why people need to increase their skills and by considering incentives and obstacles to accomplishment, one could develop a wide range of incentives that would encourage and support the enhancement of the literacy skills of our population. States should be permitted and encouraged to experiment with such incentives.

Improving the literacy skills of our population is an important national goal. The literacy programs of today are, for the reasons discussed above, not equipped to meet the challenge of the future. Public policy must prepare the way for major advances in literacy services so that significant gains in skills can be realized. Part of this preparation will require that public policymakers support the creation of a literacy profession in order to attract and retain more full-time staff to the field and provide incentives for improving the quality of instruction. This job requires both national and state leadership. It requires a federal presence for purposes of leadership, research and development and capacity building, and funding for staff development and training. It requires state intervention to establish and maintain standards of professionalism, create a climate of practice-based research to advance the field, encourage and support local staff development and training efforts, and drive the development of a performance-based accountability system.

But responsibilities are not limited to state and federal government. The problem is too large and the resources too scarce. Cooperative efforts between government and the private sector must be expanded and full use must be made of the resource of trained volunteers. All sectors and interests must contribute collaboratively toward the advancement of the adult literacy profession in order to reach the common goal of adult literacy enhancement.

SUMMARY OF FEDERAL INITIATIVES

1. Exert leadership to change the rhetoric of adult literacy and increase understanding of the need for enhancement of literacy skills.

2. Change federal legislation in the following ways:

- Reorient existing federal legislation and programs to the state of the art knowledge and goals for literacy enhancement and to accountability in the field.
- Build requirements for pre-service and on-going in-service training into federal grant programs.
- Create a set-aside in each federal program providing funds for adult literacy of 6 percent of program costs to be used for staff development and training at the operating program level. Tie compensation increases for literacy personnel to receipt of training. Increase federal appropriations to cover the additional 6 percent.
- Designate the states as the responsible entities for assuring that literacy program providers have received instruction in the state of the art and have demonstrated proficiency in each of the areas.
- Provide $500,000 for each state for the development of free-standing state centers staff development and training for adult literacy personnel. Provide incentives for states to form multi-state centers.
- Encourage state university systems to develop practice-oriented research programs in adult literacy.
- Create a national institute for basic skills to develop state of the art models and materials for training literacy personnel.
- Grant flexibility to the states to experiment with incentives for individuals to upgrade their literacy skills.

3. Strengthen and support the development of existing national adult literacy associations and encourage states to support statewide professional associations.

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SUSAN E. FOSTER

Ms. Susan E. Foster, a partner in Brizius & Foster, is a public affairs consultant specializing in government management and operations and the human services. She has had extensive experience in management and policy development at all levels of government and holds an MSW degree in Social Policy from Rutgers Graduate School of Social Work. She has served in county government in Pennsylvania and in state government in New Jersey and Illinois. Prior to entering private consulting, Ms. Foster served as Deputy Under Secretary of the U.S. Department of HEW. Ms. Foster has authored a volume entitled Preventing Teenage Pregnancy and recently coauthored a book entitled Enhancing Adult Literacy. She currently serves as Chairperson of the National Scanning Board. Her firm produces the State Policy Data Book, the State Policy Data Diskette and State Policy Trends.